

ROBERT G. SPIVACK

No Better Political Ear



WASHINGTON.

AS the Administration enters its second six months, a great many questions about its character and direction remain unclear—just as there are still questions about the young President himself.

Is he shrewd? Is he wise? Is he really a good politician? Or has he merely looked good in the absence of astute opposition? These questions will be debated for some time to come.

But one thing emerges clearly: we have not in many years had a President with better political antennae. He is sensitive to criticism, but also responsive to it. As an example of what I mean, look at the controversy over Federal assistance to public schools.

The school-aid program bogged down in the Rules Committee by an 8 to 7 vote, because Congressman John Delaney of Queens felt so strongly about help for parochial schools.

There were those who took the attitude, as Speaker Rayburn apparently did, that now was the time to resort to the politician's favorite device for handling棘手 problems: lay them aside.

There were also those high in the Administration who saw these developments as perhaps a sign of retreat. Now, at last, they said, there was an example of sidestepping the whole controversy. Every-

body would be blamed on Edward W. Butler, Catholic

IN addition there was the crisis building up over Berlin. The President, it was argued, needed the united support of the entire nation. The school bill might divide it. He was embattled with the Soviet Union's wily Mr. Khrushchev. Was it not too much to ask that he also take on Messrs. Smith, Delaney and a variety of other opponents?

But Mr. Kennedy thought otherwise. Two press conference comments illustrate his strong feelings on the matter:

"I consider it (school aid) to be probably the most important piece of domestic legislation," the President said. And later on:

"My view is that assistance for public education should be passed by this session. I'm hopeful a majority of the members of the House will agree because I think it would be a most important step forward."

Along with his generalized expression of sentiment, the President also threw in just a little hint of what he might do if the opposition prevailed. To those Congressmen who come from so-called "impacted areas" (that is, where a large number of Federal employees send their children to local schools) there was just a suggestion that Federal aid might also be cut in their districts.

THIS could mean higher local taxes, a point not likely to be lost on any congressman.

It is by no means certain that the President can win this fight, without massive public support.

What is really significant is that the President has chosen to fight. Once that is plain to members of Congress, some seemingly insurmountable reasons for not supporting the legislation will disappear. After all the President holds many cards in his hands if he chooses to play them.

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There is an aspect of the Bowles case that concerns some observers here. It is the continuing tendency of persons closely associated with the President to attack in a particularly disagreeable fashion those with whom they disagree.

They are quite impartial about this—but the degree of intolerance seems out of place in an Administration that wants to be regarded as liberal and forward-looking.

After all, whose judgment these days is so infallible there is no room for dissent?

FOR weeks stories have been printed and not denied that one of the younger members of the Administration gave Chester Bowles, aged 60, former Ambassador to India and ex-Governor of Connecticut, a merciless dressing-down because he expressed doubts about the wisdom of the Cuban action.

In the present case the attacks have been anonymous, as they were in previous episodes involving the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Allen Dulles, the J. I. A. boss.

What makes all these affairs so unfortunate is that they seem to indicate that the White House has no clear concept of how to use the talents of the many capable men it has put in high office.